

Rethinking human impacts and actions. Rebuilding time scales and sequences.

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Perspective: Theoretical vision

Fields: Earth life support systems - Economy and technology - Social processes and structures

Issues: Bio-geological equilibrium and ecological decay

In line with much widespread post-1989 enthusiasm, Francis Fukuyama foresaw that the liberal democracies of the Western world and the economic systems on which they were based were close to providing humanity with an era of prosperity and harmony. In *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992), he indeed claimed that liberalism represents the ultimate form of human governance, capable of bringing an end to conflicts or the need to fight to defend people's rights, since capitalism together with its concomitant technological development would by themselves bring about political participation and egalitarianism, paving the way for freedom and justice for all.

The longest and still ongoing economic crisis yet known within capitalism, increasing conflicts over rights and access to resources and large-scale migrant flows determined by unsustainable living conditions are but some of the manifestations of current developments that demolish such facile optimism and render Fukuyama's scenario of social harmony evermore remote from the reality within our affluent societies. Moreover, the very social classes that have based their wealth and wellbeing on liberalism seem suspended in a temporal limbo, incapable of recognizing and assuming their moral responsibilities both for an untenable past and toward future generations for whom the idea of increasing prosperity seems evermore a mockery of their legitimate aspirations.

This issue of *Visions for Sustainability* aims at offering some analyses and perspectives that contain examples of the kinds of discontinuities necessary to break out of current temporal impasses and the associated partial or total blindness they engender.

Starting from a wide-ranging historical perspective and with particular reference to the French historians Christophe Bonneuil and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz, in *A Philosophical Point of View on the Theory of Anthropocene*,

Mariaenrica Giannuzzi considers various aspects of human impacts on our planet, proposes a view of the interrelatedness of the history of nature and the philosophy of history and examines the relationships between conscious human activity and its unconscious environmental outcomes. She critiques current limited views of the anthropocene that seem to assign blame to humanity in general rather than to specific political and economic forces that are as oppressive towards vast numbers of human beings as they are to our planet in general and poses the question of how to go beyond the modern paradigm of the relationship between capital and labor that is no longer environmentally sustainable.

Since we now know that all Earth system processes are being overwhelmingly altered by human activities, we can have no faith in any kind of human governance that claim the advent of prosperity and peace while maintaining unchanged the current inequalities in power and consumption. However, the reactions of mainstream politics and economics are very far from being sustainable. For example, the last COP21 climate conference, held in Paris on December 2015, resulted in a purely technical and non-binding agreement to maintain a two-degree target for global temperature rise. If the Paris Conference brought back climate change to the center of the international agenda, we are still a far cry from the kind of action required.

In *Knowledge and competence. Key concepts in an educational paradigm for a sustainable society*, Martin Dodman suggests that way of acting depends on our way of knowing. By examining the concepts of knowledge and competence from the perspective of their importance for creating the kind of resilience and transformability necessary to build a sustainable society, he proposes a need to change the current educational paradigm in which there is a given body of knowledge that needs to be acquired and then applied as

competence. Knowledge is seen as a cultural construct that depends on the reasons for which it is built and that determine its types and characteristics. Education should see competence as first and foremost the capacity to build new knowledge based on a desire for sustainability rather than the desire to exploit and manipulate that has long characterized much of the knowledge valued by human capital and functionalist paradigms. In this way, lifelong learning becomes a process of asking why, what and how to build knowledge, together with how to use it, thereby promoting a new relationship between human beings and the global ecosystem that hosts us.

In *Francis of Assisi and the Wolf: Nonviolence as a moral value of biophilia*, Giuseppe Barbiero considers questions relating to social ethics and suggests that solidarity and nonviolence are examples of the many potential ways through which biophilia can express itself. Through reference to the social ecologist Stephen Kellert, he argues that love for life and moral values can feed into and out of each other. In this way they are able to produce advantageous attitudes potentially expressed as human behavioral patterns that emerge through long-term evolutionary processes, despite the fact that recent human history would seem to have endangered them.

The final contributions to this issue address the question of *Law, ecology, and infrastructural megaprojects*, highlighting the current failure of jurisprudence to defend environmental rights in the face of the greed of an industrialized, capitalistic economy. Alessandra Algostino examines *The Authoritarian approach of Megaprojects versus Democracy: The International People's Court Defends The Right Of Participation*, with particular reference to a case concerning the construction of a high-speed rail in Valsusa in Piedmont, Italy. Enzo Ferrara reviews *The Ecology of Law. Toward a Legal System in Tune with Nature and Community* by Fritjof

Capra and Ugo Mattei, taking as a point of departure for his analysis a number of controversial decisions by courts in Italy.

Many ways of promoting different forms of action exist, bringing together, for example, perspectives from art, science and literature, as the Swedish KTH Environmental Humanities Laboratory is trying to do through organizing a Festival of *Stories of the Anthropocene* in Stockholm from October 27th to October 29th, 2016. A further example is provided by the many endeavors to promote peace and cooperation through nonviolent action. The International Peace Bureau is planning a World Congress under the title *Disarm! For a Climate of Peace*, to be held from September 30th to October 3rd 2016 in Berlin. One crucial question is, however, that of whether it is possible – and how – to create the will within our affluent societies to change direction and give rise to a process of transformation based on environmental justice and equal distribution of resources and rights all over the world, thereby reducing the current credibility gap between international claims on sustainability and the real outcomes of dominant human actions.

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<http://www.kth.se/en/abe/inst/philhist/historia/ehl/stories-of-the-anthr/call-for-stories-1644935>